In this issue:
- **USDA Tests Usability**
- **eAuthentication Shifts Architecture Plan**
- **Geospatial One-Stop Moves Forward**
- **USDA To Create eGovernment Advisory Board**

USDA Tests Usability

The eDeployment Web Presence team is redesigning USDA's Web site with an emphasis on customer intentions and service needs rather than the current agency-centric approach. Following development of the overall presentation layer and a series of HTML templates, the team conducted usability testing on a sample user community to ensure the design is effective in meeting the needs of USDA online users.

From October 21st-24th, 18 individuals representing segments of USDA's vast customer base, including agricultural producers, low income families, conservationists, members of the press, educators and students, participated in the individual usability testing sessions. During each session, participants explored the features and functionalities of the new USDA.gov and provided feedback based on their experiences. Participants were asked to complete specific tasks using the redesigned USDA.gov Web site during an hour long interview session to evaluate the following elements:

- Homepage;
- Site Navigation;
- Web Content/Terminology;
- Overall Look and Feel ; and
- Customization Functionality.

Usability Testing in Action: A test facilitator leads each participant through a series of predefined scenarios.

Following the tests, the team compiled the final test data highlighting usability testing issues and other observations into a results matrix. Design recommendations from these results will be discussed with USDA stakeholders and incorporated into the final design of the new USDA.gov Web site as well as USDA's evolving guidelines and standards for the look, feel and navigation of agency Web sites.

For more information on Usability Testing for USDA.gov, please contact the eGovernment Team.

eAuthentication Shifts Architecture Plans

As a cornerstone of the President's eGovernment strategy, eAuthentication has become one of the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) highest priority Presidential Initiatives. To address the *Expanding Electronic Government* Initiative of the President's Management Agenda, the Federal Government is leveraging its online capabilities to improve business processes and provide constituents with better access to online information. eAuthentication enables agencies to focus on specific functionality rather than the complex authentication process.

The first interim capability, known as the eAuthentication Gateway, was a physical centralized point of authentication intended to perform authentication for agency applications government-wide. Recently however, the General Services Administration (GSA) has recommended that this Gateway approach should no longer be pursued. The new recommended direction for eAuthentication is a more "federated" architecture. This new "federated" architecture design allows participating agency applications and credential services to communicate directly through standards, specified by industry, rather than communicating through a physical gateway. To drive this new direction, GSA has formed an Architecture Working Group (AWG) composed of its own personnel and representatives from key participating agencies, including USDA. This group will deliver an interim architecture by December 15th, followed by a final architecture in April 2004.

In addition to the AWG, GSA has also commissioned a pilot to demonstrate the new authentication architecture design capable of meeting emerging standards. The pilot, scheduled to continue through March 2004, will demonstrate interoperabi-

lity using the Security Assertion Markup Language to assert identity. As a major contributor to the eAuthentication Initiative, USDA has been selected as one of the primary participants in this pilot. The goal of the pilot is to provide credentials for use with the Grants.gov Presidential Initiative. This level of involvement will allow USDA to play a significant role in shaping the new "federated" model as well as the future direction of the eAuthentication Initiative as a whole.

For more information on the new eAuthentication architecture, please visit http://www.cio.gov/eauthentication.

Geospatial One-Stop Moves Forward

In light of the recent natural disasters and upcoming winter weather conditions, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) have become even more critical in addressing security, emergency, economic, social and environmental issues. Traditionally, geospatial data has been created and maintained autonomously at each level of the government, making the time-sensitive exchange of geo-data between, and sometimes within, government organztions labor-intensive and problematic. The Presidential Initiative Geospatial-One-Stop (GOS) was established to overcome many of these issues through a collaborative effort to create a comprehensive Web portal http://www.geodata.gov that offers more accurate and accessible data to all levels of the government. For example, Geodata.gov provides easy to visualize geographic information that allows quick understanding of weather patterns and helps responders identify potential dangers. Information can be quickly updated, combined and transmitted over the Internet to support real time decision-making.

In September, Geodata.gov featured online resources such as Web links, maps and geo-spatial images integrated from numerous government sources on the impact of Hurricane Isabel that shut down much of the East Coast as well as the September 25th earthquake in Japan and its potential impact on the United States. Geodata.gov quickly emerged as a critical tool for intergovernmental and partnership collaboration among federal, state, local and private organizations.

As an active participant of this Initiative, USDA provides access to the Department's geospatial Resource Data Gateway from Geodata.gov. The vision of the Gateway is to provide easy access and delivery of geospatial environmental data to customers and business partners. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Rural Development (RD) utilize and combine several Geographic Information Services to provide the array of information available at the Gateway. According to Dennis Lytle, USDA's GOS liaison, "Resource Data Gateway has been a critical component in implementing GIS at USDA. Prior to the implementation of the Gateway, agency staff spent countless hours locating the most current authoritative geospatial data. With the support from Gateway and GOS, it is much easier and faster not only for our employees, but also the public".

With the goals of improved interoperability and access to geospatial resources, Geodata.gov is the first major milestone for GOS. Although the portal is only the first step, work on a second iteration of the portal with enhanced capability and alignment with the Federal Enterprise Architecture is already underway. This type of continuing intergovernmental collaboration and partnership will become invaluable for long term forecasting, predicting the impacts of agency programs, natural resources management, agriculture disaster prediction, fire prediction and emergency response, homeland security, environmental protection and economic development.

For more information on Geospatial One Stop, please visit http://www.geo-one-stop.gov/

USDA To Create eGovernment Advisory Board

In early November, USDA's Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) announced the formation of a Technology and eGovernment Advisory Council to seek collaboration from a broad base of USDA customers, business partners, and employees into the Department's planning and implementation of technology solutions. "Our staff has been around the country in recent months receiving valuable input from customers at farm shows and conferences," said USDA Chief Information Officer (CIO) Scott Charbo. "This Advisory Council is another great way to receive customer feedback on USDA's information technology and eGovernment efforts."

OCIO is seeking nominations for nine members and nine alternates who will begin serving three-year terms in May 2004. The Council members, appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture, will represent the interests of USDA's broad spectrum of stakeholders. Mr. Charbo has stated that every effort will be made to select Council members who are outstanding in their respective professions and are knowledgeable of the various mission areas of USDA, and on how technology, from both the Federal and private industry, can be used to improve productivity and services. The Council will meet quarterly and serve without compensation.

Persons interested in serving on the Advisory Council, or in nominating individuals to serve, should contact OCIO, by telephone (202-720-8833), fax (202-720-1031), or e-mail (adrienne.bowman@usda.gov) and request the Nomination Form AD-755 (also available at USDA's Web site at: http://www.ocio.usda.gov). The completed nomination forms must be submitted to OCIO by no later than January 15, 2004.

For more information on the eGovernment Advisory Council, please contact the eGovernment Team.

For more information on any of these topics, or for general comments or questions, contact the eGovernment Team at:
- **Phone: (202) 720-6144**
- **eMail: egov@usda.gov**
- **Web: www.egov.usda.gov**